

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

JOSE ROBERT GUTIERREZ,

No. C 08-3286 WHA (PR)

Petitioner,

**ORDER DENYING PETITION FOR WRIT  
OF HABEAS CORPUS**

v.

M. S. EVANS, Warden,

Respondent.

**INTRODUCTION**

This is a federal habeas corpus action filed by a state prisoner pursuant to 28 U.S.C. 2254. Respondent was ordered to show cause why the writ should not be granted based on the claims set forth in the petition. Respondent has filed an answer and a memorandum of points and authorities in support of it. Petitioner has responded with a “Denial and Exception to the Return to the Order to Show Cause and Memorandum of Points and Authorities in Support Thereof” which is construed as a traverse. For the reasons set forth below, the petition is **DENIED**.

**STATEMENT**

In 2005, a Monterey County Superior Court jury found petitioner guilty of one count of first-degree murder, and two counts of attempted deliberate and premeditated murder (Exh. C5 at 9-10). The jury found true the allegations that each offense was committed for the benefit of a criminal street gang, that petitioner had personally and intentionally discharged a firearm on all counts, and that he personally inflicted great bodily injury as to the first count of attempted deliberate and

1 premeditated murder (*id.* at 10).

2 On February 14th, 2006, the trial court sentenced petitioner to a term of 50 years to life for  
3 the count of murder, 40 years to life for the first count of attempted deliberate and premeditated  
4 murder, and 35 years to life for the second count of attempted deliberate and premeditated murder,  
5 for a total term of 125 years to life (*ibid.*). The California Court of Appeal for the Sixth Appellate  
6 District affirmed the judgment (*id.* at 24). The California Supreme Court denied his petition for  
7 review (Exh. E).

8 The following background facts describing the crime are taken from the opinion of the  
9 California Court of Appeal:

10 On the evening of January 17, 2004, Gustavo Silva drove his red Chevy pickup truck  
11 with two friends, Victor Loyo and Ramiro Barrios, from the Monterey Peninsula to the  
12 Northridge Mall in Salinas and then to the parking lot of the Los Arcos Restaurant. They  
met Leticia Brisenio (Silva's friend), who arrived a short time later in another car along  
with her cousin, young nephew, and two other women.

13 Silva and Brisenio were together talking outside the truck on the passenger's side; they  
14 were standing about even with where the truck bed connected with the cab. Loyo and  
15 Barrios were talking on the other side of the truck behind the opening of the driver's  
door. (Both doors of the truck were open.) The car with the other girls was parked by the  
driver's side of the truck.

16 A male approached Loyo and Barrios on the driver's side of the truck. He was wearing  
17 black pants, a hooded sweater or sweatshirt, and a black beanie. Silva became suspicious  
18 of him by the way he approached his friends. The male asked Barrios and Loyo where  
they were from. According to Silva, Barrios responded that "he was from Monterey . . .  
19 he wasn't nothin.' " Silva understood from this that Barrios was saying that he wasn't  
in any gang, that he was an "[a]verage working guy." Loyo testified that he was the one  
who responded, saying, " 'We're not from around here. We're just here listening to  
20 music.' " (Loyo recalled that the male then turned and repeated his question to Silva.)

21 The male then pulled a gun from the pocket of his sweater and started shooting. He shot  
22 Barrios. Loyo started running. The male then went back behind the truck to shoot at  
23 Silva, who ran toward the front of the truck and to the front door of the restaurant. Silva  
was shot in the shoulder, and the bullet passed through his body. As he was running,  
Silva heard screams. Brisenio was shot in the back as she was running toward the car  
and was immediately paralyzed. [Footnote omitted].

24 Salinas Police Officer Steven Long was the first officer to respond to the scene of the  
25 shooting, arriving at approximately 9:00 p.m. The area was adequately lit and no  
additional illumination was needed to conduct the investigation. A deceased male was  
26 lying face down in the parking lot next to a light pole. There was a female seated near  
him (Brisenio) who was screaming that she had been shot in the back and had no feeling  
27 in her legs. There was a red pickup truck parked in the lot adjacent to the same light pole  
near where the deceased male was located. Officer Long observed numerous  
28 nine-millimeter shell casings "strewn about the truck and in the area of the victims."

1 Dr. John Hain, a forensic pathologist, performed an autopsy two days after the shooting  
2 and concluded that Barrios had sustained at least six gunshot wounds. Four of the  
3 gunshot wounds were in the heart or aorta or both, and Dr. Hain opined that any one of  
4 those four wounds would have been fatal. Salinas Police Officer Neil Herrier, who  
5 attended the autopsy, testified that the six hollow-point bullets recovered were from a  
6 nine millimeter handgun.

7 (Exh. C5 at 2-3.) Additionally, the prosecution introduced gang evidence to support the gang  
8 enhancement (*id.* at 20). The state appellate court summarized the introduction of gang evidence at  
9 trial as follows:

10 The prosecution introduced substantial gang evidence in connection with the gang  
11 enhancement. [] Detective Bohn offered significant expert testimony concerning the  
12 characteristics and criminal activities of Norteos [sic], defendant's membership in the  
13 Norteo [sic] SEM gang, his association over the years with Norteos [sic], and opinion  
14 evidence as to whether the Los Arcos shootings were committed for the benefit of the  
15 Norteo [sic] criminal street gang.

16 At the outset of the trial, defendant filed a motion in limine to exclude the gang expert  
17 testimony on the grounds that it included inadmissible hearsay and was cumulative.  
18 Defendant also moved to bifurcate the trial so that the gang enhancement would be tried  
19 separately. Those matters were argued extensively. The court denied the motion to  
20 bifurcate; [footnote omitted] it further denied defendant's request to limit the scope of  
21 the proposed gang expert testimony.

22 The objections were renewed prior to Detective Bohn's testimony, defendant arguing that  
23 certain gang evidence--namely, his tape-recorded jailhouse telephone conversations--was  
24 cumulative and subject to exclusion under Evidence Code section 352 because its  
25 probative value was substantially outweighed by the undue prejudice it would create.  
26 The court overruled this objection and concluded that any stipulation offered by defense  
27 counsel that defendant was a Norteo [sic] was insufficient to warrant the exclusion of the  
28 gang evidence. The court held that defendant's gang membership and the allegation that  
he committed the Los Arcos shootings for the benefit of the Norteo [sic] criminal street  
gang needed to be placed in context through evidence other than his mere gang  
membership. But the court agreed to defense counsel's proposal that it preinstruct the  
jury under CALJIC No. 2.50 at the time of the admission of the gang evidence.

29 At the beginning of Detective Bohn's testimony, the court did in fact caution the jury--  
30 based upon an adaptation of CALJIC No. 2.50--that the gang evidence (i.e., evidence of  
31 gang activity and criminal acts by gang members other than the charged crimes) could  
32 not be considered to prove that defendant had a criminal disposition; rather, it was being  
33 introduced only to attempt to establish the gang allegation.

34 (*Ibid.*)

## 35 ANALYSIS

### 36 A. STANDARD OF REVIEW

37 A district court may not grant a petition challenging a state conviction or sentence on the

1 basis of a claim that was reviewed on the merits in state court unless the state court's adjudication of  
2 the claim: "(1) resulted in a decision that was contrary to, or involved an unreasonable application  
3 of, clearly established Federal law, as determined by the Supreme Court of the United States; or (2)  
4 resulted in a decision that was based on an unreasonable determination of the facts in light of the  
5 evidence presented in the State court proceeding." 28 U.S.C. 2254(d). The first prong applies both  
6 to questions of law and to mixed questions of law and fact, *Williams (Terry) v. Taylor*, 529 U.S. 362,  
7 407 09 (2000), while the second prong applies to decisions based on factual determinations, *Miller*  
8 *El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 340 (2003).

9 A state court decision is "contrary to" Supreme Court authority, that is, falls under the first  
10 clause of 2254(d)(1), only if "the state court arrives at a conclusion opposite to that reached by [the  
11 Supreme] Court on a question of law or if the state court decides a case differently than [the  
12 Supreme] Court has on a set of materially indistinguishable facts." *Williams (Terry)*, 529 U.S. at  
13 412 13. A state court decision is an "unreasonable application of" Supreme Court authority, falls  
14 under the second clause of 2254(d)(1), if it correctly identifies the governing legal principle from the  
15 Supreme Court's decisions but "unreasonably applies that principle to the facts of the prisoner's  
16 case." *Id.* at 413. The federal court on habeas review may not issue the writ "simply because that  
17 court concludes in its independent judgment that the relevant state court decision applied clearly  
18 established federal law erroneously or incorrectly." *Id.* at 411. Rather, the application must be  
19 "objectively unreasonable" to support granting the writ. *See id.* at 409.

20 "Factual determinations by state courts are presumed correct absent clear and convincing  
21 evidence to the contrary." *Miller El*, 537 U.S. at 340. This presumption is not altered by the fact  
22 that the finding was made by a state court of appeals, rather than by a state trial court. *Sumner v.*  
23 *Mata*, 449 U.S. 539, 546 47 (1981); *Bragg v. Galaza*, 242 F.3d 1082, 1087 (9th Cir.), amended, 253  
24 F.3d 1150 (9th Cir. 2001). A petitioner must present clear and convincing evidence to overcome  
25 Section 2254(e)(1)'s presumption of correctness; conclusory assertions will not do. *Ibid.*

26 Under 28 U.S.C. ' 2254(d)(2), a state court decision "based on a factual determination will  
27 not be overturned on factual grounds unless objectively unreasonable in light of the evidence  
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1 presented in the state court proceeding." *Miller El*, 537 U.S. at 340; *see also Torres v. Prunty*, 223  
2 F.3d 1103, 1107 (9th Cir. 2000).

3 When there is no reasoned opinion from the highest state court to consider the petitioner's  
4 claims, the court looks to the last reasoned opinion, which in this case is that of the California Court  
5 of Appeal. *See Ylst v. Nunnemaker*, 501 U.S. 797, 801 06 (1991).

6 **B. ISSUES PRESENTED**

7 As grounds for federal habeas relief, petitioner claims that the trial court: (1) violated his  
8 rights under the Confrontation Clause of the Sixth Amendment by refusing to unseal evidence  
9 petitioner wanted to use to cross-examine a prosecution witness referred to as "John Doe;" (2)  
10 violated his due process rights when it refused to hold a hearing on whether to reveal juror identities  
11 to petitioner for use in a juror misconduct investigation; and (3) violated his right to due process  
12 when it admitted expert testimony on Norteño gang activity (Pet. 8).

13 **1. Confrontation Clause**

14 Petitioner claims that the trial court violated his Confrontation Clause right by refusing to  
15 unseal evidence that petitioner wanted to use to cross-examine "John Doe," a prosecution witness.  
16 The evidence petitioner wanted, which the trial court reviewed in camera, were: (1) the identity of a  
17 person identified in the record as "Witness Two;" (2) John Doe's juvenile court records; (3) police  
18 reports from Doe's vehicle theft conviction, and (4) an affidavit supporting a search warrant for  
19 petitioner's residence (Pet. 8). Petitioner argues that if he obtained this evidence, he could have used  
20 it to cross-examine Doe more effectively and the jury would not have found him guilty (*id.* at 8c).  
21 The state appellate court denied petitioner's claim because the in-camera materials had little to no  
22 probative value, Doe was substantially impeached with other evidence of his lengthy history of  
23 criminal activity and dishonesty in dealing with law enforcement, and the police report and warrant  
24 affidavit were neither discoverable nor of use to petitioner (Exh. C5 at 13-16).

25 The Confrontation Clause of the Sixth Amendment provides that in criminal cases the  
26 accused has the right to "be confronted with witnesses against him." U.S. Const. amend. VI. It does  
27 not prevent a trial judge from imposing reasonable limits on cross-examination based on concerns of  
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1 harassment, prejudice, confusion of issues, witness safety or interrogation that is repetitive or only  
2 marginally relevant. *Delaware v. Van Arsdall*, 475 U.S. 673, 679 (1986). The Confrontation Clause  
3 guarantees an opportunity for effective cross-examination, not cross-examination that is effective in  
4 whatever way, and to whatever extent, the defense might wish. *See Delaware v. Fensterer*, 474 U.S.  
5 15, 20 (1985) (per curiam). A defendant meets his burden of showing a Confrontation Clause  
6 violation by showing that “[a] reasonable jury might have received a significantly different  
7 impression of [a witness’] credibility . . . had counsel been permitted to pursue his proposed line of  
8 cross-examination.” *Van Arsdall*, 475 U.S. at 680.

9 To determine whether a criminal defendant’s Sixth Amendment right of confrontation has  
10 been violated by the exclusion of evidence on cross-examination, a court must inquire whether: “(1)  
11 the evidence was relevant; (2) there were other legitimate interests outweighing the defendant’s  
12 interests in presenting the evidence; and (3) the exclusion of evidence left the jury with sufficient  
13 information to assess the credibility of the witness.” *United States v. Beardslee*, 197 F.3d 378, 383  
14 (9th Cir. 1999).

15 First, petitioner claims that the trial court violated his rights under the Confrontation Clause  
16 by refusing to unseal the identity of a possible witness identified by the prosecution prior to trial as  
17 “Witness Two” (Pet. 8). Petitioner argued to the trial court that he wanted to find Witness Two  
18 because Witness Two could offer testimony undermining the credibility of prosecution witness John  
19 Doe (Exh. C5 at 11). The trial court held an in-camera hearing and found that Witness Two had the  
20 same information about John Doe as another witness that was disclosed to the defense, Edgar Vargas  
21 (*ibid.*). After finding that Witness Two’s testimony would be cumulative to Vargas’s, and weighing  
22 that against the risk to Witness Two of disclosing his identity to the defense, the trial court denied  
23 Petitioner’s request to unseal Witness Two’s identity (*id.* at 12). At trial, Vargas testified for the  
24 defense that John Doe had admitted to him that he had shot a person in a schoolyard for gang  
25 reasons, and Witness Two was not called as a witness by either side. The state appellate court  
26 agreed with the trial court, finding that any anticipated testimony of Witness Two was cumulative of  
27 Vargas’s testimony and would not have provided any additional evidence that might have  
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1 exonerated petitioner (Exh. C5 at 13).

2 It is true that while Witness Two's testimony would have been cumulative to Vargas's, the  
3 prosecutor brought out evidence on cross-examination that undermined Vargas's credibility  
4 (Reporter's Transcript at 3616-37). Vargas explained that he was offering this testimony in order to  
5 improve his position with the police and District Attorney with respect to a weapons possession  
6 charge (*id.* at 3610-11), testified that he did not know Doe very well (*id.* at 3617), and testified to his  
7 lengthy criminal history (*id.* at 3630-31). Nevertheless, even assuming that Witness Two's  
8 credibility could not have been similarly undermined, his absence did not substantially deprive  
9 petitioner of the opportunity to impeach Doe. Doe had been impeached by a variety of other  
10 evidence in addition to Vargas's testimony, including "his lengthy criminal history, [and] his  
11 frequent dishonesty in his dealings with law enforcement" (Exh. C5 at 13). Given the cumulative  
12 nature of Witness Two's testimony, the substantial other evidence upon which the jury could assess  
13 Doe's credibility, and the trial court's finding that there was a risk of harm to Witness Two if his  
14 identity were disclosed given the gang-related charges, the trial court did not violate petitioner's  
15 rights under the Confrontation Clause when it refused to unseal the identity of Witness Two.

16 Next, petitioner argues that the trial court violated his rights under the Confrontation Clause  
17 when it refused to unseal John Doe's juvenile court records in order to find materials which might  
18 aid in impeaching Doe (Pet. 8). At the in-camera hearing, the trial court found that nothing in the  
19 juvenile record could have been admitted and used for the purpose of impeaching Doe (Exh. C5 at  
20 13). The state appellate court agreed and further explained that Doe had been substantially  
21 impeached with his "his lengthy criminal history, his frequent dishonesty in his dealings with law  
22 enforcement, and his alleged involvement in a schoolyard shooting" (*id.* at 13-14). There is nothing  
23 in the record to indicate that Doe's juvenile record contained any admissible impeachment evidence.  
24 Further, because Doe was impeached with his lengthy criminal history and dishonesty with law  
25 enforcement, it was reasonable for the trial court to find that further cross-examination based upon  
26 Doe's juvenile record would have added little. As the exclusion of Doe's juvenile record did not  
27 leave the jury with insufficient information to assess the credibility of John Doe, the trial court did  
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1 not violate petitioner's rights under the Confrontation Clause.

2 Next, petitioner claims that the trial court violated his rights under the Confrontation Clause  
3 when it refused to unseal a police report regarding Doe's prior conviction for car theft (Pet. 8). The  
4 state appellate court affirmed the trial court's ruling because Doe had been properly impeached with  
5 the vehicle theft conviction and the report itself contained no additional information for  
6 impeachment (Exh. C5 at 14-15). Because evidence other than the name or type of crime and the  
7 date and place of convictions would have been inadmissible under California law (*id.* at 14),  
8 petitioner could not have used any such evidence in the report to cross-examine Doe. Furthermore,  
9 because Doe was properly impeached with the vehicle theft conviction itself, *ibid.*, the jury was not  
10 deprived of sufficient evidence with which to assess Doe's credibility. For this reason, the trial  
11 court did not violate petitioner's rights under the Confrontation Clause when it refused to unseal the  
12 police report of Doe's vehicle theft.

13 Lastly, petitioner claims that the trial court violated his rights under the Confrontation Clause  
14 when it refused to unseal the affidavit for a warrant to search petitioner's house (Pet. 8b). According  
15 to petitioner, the affidavit would show that John Doe made an untruthful assertion that weapons  
16 would be found within petitioner's residence (*id.* at 8b). Doe's statement that guns were in the  
17 house was not evidence relied upon by the jury when it convicted petitioner. Thus, even if the  
18 affidavit could show that petitioner's statement were not true, it had minimal value because, as the  
19 California Court of Appeal explained, it "did not contain material that had any impact upon  
20 defendant's guilt or innocence with respect to the charged crimes" (Exh. C5 at 16). Moreover, as  
21 discussed above, the jury had ample other evidence with which to assess Doe's credibility insofar as  
22 he was impeached with his lengthy criminal history and dishonesty with law enforcement.  
23 Consequently, the trial court did not violate petitioner's rights under the Confrontation Clause when  
24 it refused to unseal the search warrant affidavit.

25 For the reasons discussed, the trial court's failure to disclose to petitioner sealed information  
26 regarding John Doe did not violate the Confrontation Clause. Consequently, petitioner is not  
27 entitled to federal habeas relief on this claim.

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1           **2.        Juror Identities**

2           Petitioner alleges that the trial court violated his due process rights when it refused to hold a  
3 hearing on disclosing the identities of jurors (Pet. 8). Petitioner claims that jurors considered  
4 extrajudicial information during trial when they discussed whether a large man in attendance in the  
5 courtroom was there to intimidate witnesses (*id.* at 8c-8d). According to petitioner, he needed juror  
6 contact information in order to investigate any possible juror misconduct, and the trial court's refusal  
7 to hold a hearing on this issue "deprived him of a state conferred benefit, and thus Federal Due  
8 Process" (*id.* at 8d).

9           Under Sections 206 & 207 of the California Code of Civil Procedure, "any person may make  
10 a motion to obtain access to the sealed records, accompanied by a showing of good cause" (Exh. C5  
11 at 17). The trial court denied the motion because neither the judge nor bailiff had seen the man, and  
12 the judge found that there had been nothing more than "idle chit-chat between a couple of jurors  
13 about" a large man observing court proceedings (*ibid.*). The state appellate court denied petitioner's  
14 claim finding that he had failed to make a showing of good cause (*id.* at 18-20).

15           Violations of state law generally do not implicate federal due process concerns. It is only  
16 when a state statute creates a protected "liberty interest" that the violation of state law raises federal  
17 constitutional concerns on federal habeas corpus. *See Bonin v. Calderon*, 59 F.3d 815, 841 (9th Cir.  
18 1995). A state law creates a "liberty interest" protected by the Due Process Clause if the law: (1)  
19 contains "substantive predicates" governing official decision making; (2) contains "explicitly  
20 mandatory language" specifying the outcome that must be reached if the substantive predicates are  
21 met; and (3) protects "some substantive end." *See id.* at 842. The state law must provide more than  
22 merely procedure. *Ibid.*; *Dix v. County of Shasta*, 963 F.2d 1296, 1299 (9th Cir. 1992).

23           No protected liberty interest exists with respect to obtaining juror identification information.  
24 To begin, neither statute provides substantive predicates. Instead, Section 237 requires a *prima facie*  
25 showing of good cause but does not define good cause or explain how good cause is shown other  
26 than to state that it is not established "where allegations of jury misconduct are speculative, vague,  
27 or conclusory." Cal. Code Civ. Proc. §237. Furthermore, the state law does not contain explicitly  
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1 mandatory language specifying the outcome that must be reached if the substantive predicates are  
2 met. Instead, the state rules provide a process in which a party “may” petition for an order unsealing  
3 the records and providing the jurors’ contact information for the purpose of preparing a motion for  
4 new trial, and the trial judge has discretion to grant or deny the motion (*ibid.*). Moreover, even if  
5 petitioner would have had a liberty interest in obtaining juror contact information, it was not  
6 arbitrarily taken away from him by the state in this case. Instead, petitioner was unable to show  
7 good cause in order to obtain a hearing on the matter (Exh. C5 at 19-20). For these reasons, the trial  
8 court did not violate petitioner’s right to due process when it denied his request to hold a hearing on  
9 disclosure of juror identities.

10 **3. Due Process and Expert Gang Testimony**

11 Petitioner claims that the “trial court erred in admitting irrelevant and highly prejudicial  
12 testimony by the State’s gang expert” (Pet. 8). The state appellate court rejected petitioner’s claim  
13 and explained that the testimony was “unquestionably relevant, at a minimum, to issues related to  
14 the gang enhancement” (Exh. C5 at 22).

15 The United States Supreme Court has left open the question whether the Constitution is  
16 violated by the admission of expert testimony concerning an ultimate issue to be resolved by the trier  
17 of fact. *See Moses v. Payne*, 555 F.3d 742, 761 (9th Cir. 2009). Thus, while, under Ninth Circuit  
18 precedent, it is “well established . . . that expert testimony concerning an ultimate issue is not per se  
19 improper,” *ibid.*, for purposes of habeas corpus review it suffices to determine that no Supreme  
20 Court case has squarely addressed the issue and, therefore, a state appellate court’s decision  
21 affirming the admission of such testimony is not contrary to or an unreasonable application of  
22 clearly established Supreme Court precedent under section 2254(d)(1). *See id.* at 761-62. Because  
23 the admission of such testimony is not contrary to or an unreasonable application of clearly  
24 established Supreme Court precedent, it cannot be grounds for habeas relief here.

25 Moreover, even if federal habeas relief were available on the grounds that the admission of  
26 overly prejudicial evidence violates due process, the expert gang testimony presents no such  
27 grounds. Juries are presumed to follow a court’s limiting instructions with respect to the purposes  
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1 for which evidence is admitted. *Aguilar v. Alexander*, 125 F.3d 815, 820 (9th Cir. 1997). The trial  
2 court gave the jury a limiting instruction that the expert gang evidence being introduced was for the  
3 “purpose of showing criminal street gang activities and of criminal acts by gang members other than  
4 [sic] the crimes for which the defendant is on trial” and “if believed, may not be considered . . . to  
5 prove that the defendant is a person of bad character or that he has a disposition to commit crimes  
6 (Exh. C5 at 21 n. 20). To the extent that any of the expert’s testimony was not directly on point with  
7 relating general gang information to the jury, the jury is presumed to have followed the trial court’s  
8 limiting instructions. Therefore, petitioner was not unduly prejudiced and the trial court did not  
9 violate his right to due process when it admitted the expert gang testimony.

10 **CONCLUSION**

11 The state court’s adjudication of these claims did not result in a decision that was contrary to,  
12 or involved an unreasonable application of, clearly established federal law, nor did it result in a  
13 decision that was based on an unreasonable determination of the facts in light of the evidence  
14 presented in the state court proceeding. Accordingly, the petition is **DENIED**.

15 A certificate of appealability will not issue. Reasonable jurists would not “find the district  
16 court’s assessment of the constitutional claims debatable or wrong.” *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S.  
17 473, 484 (2000). Petitioner may seek a certificate of appealability from the Court of Appeals.

18 The Clerk shall enter judgment in favor of respondent, and close the file.

19 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

20 Dated: August 9, 2010.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
WILLIAM ALSUP  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE